

Almost Home

by SPNOUAT

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Summary: When a car crashes in front of Emma Swan, it is up to her to get the stranger to the hospital. Easier said than done as she currently in the middle of nowhere with only her horse and a growing attachment to this stranger who has for better or worse just added himself to her worry list. (M for future chapters)

1. Stranger

**Stranger you followed me so far,***

**Until the roads converged, as did the stars,***

**Stranger the moon looks blue tonight, ***

**Your photo framed, raw within my mind, but not tonight.***

**Katie Costello, Stranger***

Dusk was slowly sweeping over the curving dirt road. Emma urged her horse on with a light squeeze of her claves.

_Dammit, _she thought. _David's gonna kill me. And then James, and then me again. _David hated her riding the back roads in the dark, the sharp turns, the blind hills. _I can hear the lecture now. _

But this time it really wasn't her fault. Honest. This was all James. Okay so maybe she had been the one to taken the damn horse from Marco's old stables. But James was the one to go and pick him up, and he had been at this long enough to know to have asked Marco what kind of grain the poor old gelding had been getting. But he hadn't. So here she was.

_Okay, so maybe it's a tiny bit my fault for taking a horse instead

of the truck. _She couldn't argue with herself. The truck had been sitting there, and seemed like quite a good idea now that the sun was sinking lower and lower over the tree coated horizon. She couldn't resist taking Bug out though. A chance to take her pretty Palomino for a trail ride wasn't something she was going to pass up. On the downside however, that put her here, close to dark, with a saddle bag full of feed that she would have to go into town to buy more of in the morning.

Despite her bad luck, Emma had to admit it was beautiful. The fading sunlight shown lightly through the golden and red leaves of the oak trees, dappling the road in their pattern. It was peaceful, a few birds still sang, and the wind rustled lightly through the yellow wild flowers next to her horse's legs.

And to think there was a time I was gonna leave this all behind. The thought still made her cringe, even after four years. It didn't last long, however, as a loud screech and crash sent her horse rushing in the opposite direction.

"Easy! Easy now!" Emma said to Bug as she pulled her left rein tight, bring the frightened horse back to the direction she had run from. The loud noises had stopped, to be replaced by something almost worse. It was eerily quiet now. No more birds, even the wind had seemed frightened into a sudden halt. Through the tree ahead came a soft sound: a light crackle, a soft rustle.

Bug began to walk forward again, now rounding the curve. The peaceful scene changed in an instant. A lone car was wrapped around a tall sycamore on the side of the road, throwing red flames high into to sky.

"Oh god." Emma coughed as the smoke reached her and Bug, causing the spooked mare to stop dead in her tracks. The sun had dropped even further now, bathing the sky in a red blaze. Emma quickly pulled out her cell phone, before a quick glance at the screen reminded her of where she was: the middle of nowhere with zero chance at getting any reception. "Come on Bug," she whispered, urging her closer.

Dismounting, Emma looped Bug's reins around a tree before rushing over to the car. It was flipped on its head, with flames billowing from the engine. She didn't know what she could do, but she had to do something. Cars rarely passed through this road as it only lead to Marco's farm, and Emma knew that by now Marco was most likely sitting by his fire carving something or another out of a block of wood.

Here's to hoping he decides to go for a little drive tonight.

Emma bent as close as she could to the car's windows. From what she could see there was only one man sitting in the driver's seat. He hung limp from his seat belt, blood slowly dripping down his forehead and through his dark hair.

Smoke was filling the air in the car and Emma began to cough, _I can't even imagine how he feels right now. _She pulled at the door handle, but the stubborn metal wasn't budging. _I need help, _she thought, frantically looking around her hoping for a miracle. _Not exactly a miracle, but I've had worse ideas, _Emma thought to herself

as her eyes landed on Bug.

It didn't take long before she had her rope tided at one end to her saddle horn and the other to the door.

"Come on girl, move it!" Emma chanted to Bug as she led the horse away from the car. The old rope pulled taunt, and the door gave a loud creak before springing open. Emma rushed to the man still unconscious in the car.

"Hey! Buddy! Wake up!" Emma called into his ear as she shook his shoulders. The man gave no response. "Alright-" Emma began before a round of coughing overtook her. The flames were getting bigger, the smoke thicker, and the last rays of the sun were working across the surface of the road. "Plan B. it is then." Emma grunted, pulling her shirt collar over her nose.

Unbuckling the man's seat belt proved to be more of a challenge than she had imagined. She wound up completely underneath him to reach for it. The heat within the car was almost unbearable. She gave a sympathetic cringe at the black leather jacket the man wore, he was surely roasting in it. She managed to get the seat belt undone.

"Oh god!" She yelled in surprise as the man dropped forward into her once freed from the seat belt, _guess I didn't really think that one through. _She heaved, she pulled, and she drug. The man's body moved slowly, the dead weight of him nearly suffocating her in the smoke and flames. Surely, but oh so slowly, Emma pulled him through the door, and onto the ground a few feet beside the car.

"Bug!" She called, before letting out a low whistle. The mare came hesitantly, each step paired with a flare of her nostrils and wide eyes. Pulling herself out from under the man, Emma grabbed Bug's reins. She would never be able to lift the stranger that high, but Bug wasn't her star girl for nothing. Walking the horse next to the man, Emma cued her to bow as she had done many times before. After asking her to stay down, Emma worked as quickly as she could to drag the man across Bug's neck and the front of her saddle. Emma was quick to claim into the saddle before asking Bug to stand.

The man's weight shifted as the mare stood, but with Emma's hands firmly latched onto his arms and the leather of his jacket he stayed in place. With a kiss to Bug they were off. _That's gotta hurt, _Emma thought, watching the man bounce around the front of her saddle as she cantered on. _Sorry pal, but the sooner I get you to the hospital the better. _

Night had fully fallen by the time Bug's hooves touched the main drag into town. Sleepy little Storybrooke was down for the night. Even Granny's, which stayed open far past anything else, had their closed sign out front. _On the upside, _Emma thought with a dark chuckle, _no traffic to worry about. _Storybrooke General was just down the street, but wasn't the sole source of light as Emma cantered up to it. The police station stood across the street, and the loud clatter of Bug's hooves against the pavement drew out its occupants.

"Emma!" David called, rushing out the doors, James hot on his heels. "What happened?"

"He crashed his car on the old bridge road, the whole thing is going

up in flames." She said, helping to push the man into James and David's waiting arms.

"The troll bridge road?" James asked, slinging the man's arm over his shoulder as David did the same with the other.

"That's the one, I was riding home when I saw him." Emma explained, dismounting Bug before latching her to the pole outside the building with a quick pat to her neck.

"Wait, you were on that road at night?" David exclaimed as Emma ran forward to open the doors to Storybrooke General.

"That is neither here nor there!" Emma sighed as a group of nurses came rushing forward.

For Emma, the next few hours went by in a blur. David and James rushed off to call the fire department and attend to the still burning car. A kind nurse asked Emma a few questions about the man, to which Emma had no answers. They found no ID on him, no cellphone, not even a wallet. As a result, Emma was put as his emergency contact.

It was nearing 1 AM when David and James returned. The whole car was ablaze when the firefighters had arrived with James and David. Any clue as to who the strange man might have been was gone now, along with most of the grass and all of the leaves of the tree he had hit. It was James who informed her that the firefighters said it was lucky they had gotten there before the fire had spread and caused any damage to the surrounding farm fields. It was David, however, that finally sent her home.

"You need to get some sleep." He told her as he walked her out of the hospital.

"What about Bug?" She protested as he walked her to the car.

"I put her in a trailer and sent her home with Marco's son hours ago Ems."

"You did? Where was I?" She asked, trying to remember the last time she had looked outside at her beloved horse. She had made sure to bring her a bucket of water "curtesy of the kind nurse" around 11.

"You were talking to a nurse about John Doe." He laughed. "Don't worry so much," he said, catching the look on her face. "Dr. Whale said he was going to be fine."

"He said he might be fine. He hasn't even woken up yet. They don't even know if he will." Emma couldn't figure out why the idea hurt so much, but she knew if he didn't wake up it always would.

"He will." David said climbing in the car after her.

"And how are you so sure?" Emma asked, turning towards him from the passenger seat of his police cruiser.

"Because you already saved him. The world wouldn't have put you through all that just to let him slip through the cracks now." David

told her with a smile.

Her quiet reply was into the glass of the window, "I don't feel like I saved anyone."

2. Doctor

**Oh I wish I was a doctor who could heal your broken heart,**

**Analyze each bruise and hear your story from the start,**

**And stitch up every tiny tear with a ribbon and a bow,**

**Prescribe you some new medicine that makes you feel less alone.**

**Emily Kinney: Doctor**

If there was one thing her years on this Misthaven Ranch had taught her, it was that horses and lazy mornings didn't go well together. Despite her late night of arriving home after 2 AM to check on Mary Margret and Henry, Emma was still up with the rising sun and out to the barn. Each horse was fed, each water bucket was filled, and what seemed like countless flakes of hay were thrown before she made it back into the house to get Henry ready for the day.

"I don't know how you do it." Came the sleepy voice of Mary Margret as the petite brunette walked into the kitchen to find Emma making eggs with Henry balanced on her hip.

"Years of practice." Emma replied, sliding a freshly made plate to her. "And thanks again for looking after Henry and the new gelding last night." With everything going on at the hospital the poor horse hadn't gotten anything more than some extra hay last night. It did make a pang of guilt course through her as she watched him devour his grain this morning.

"It was no trouble," Mary Margret smiled. "And you know I love spending time with this little guy." Mary Margret pinched Henry's cheek as she walked by.

"No, Aunt Mary! No!" Henry wiggled in Emma's arms to be let down, and Emma complied.

"When are you and David gonna get on with having your own so he stops stealing mine?" Emma laughed, thinking of last weekend when David and James had commandeered Henry for what they declared a boys weekend.

"Hey give us some time! We need our house back first!" Mary Margret protested, flicking her fork in Emma's direction. The renovations on the Nolan's house were taking longer than expected. Emma secretly thought David kept finding something else to be fixed to delay their return. He always said that he loved the little house in the suburbs with its white picket fence, but Emma knew him too well. As much as he might claim it was perfect he grew up here on the ranch, he wanted something with a little more space. A bit more yard at least.

"Yeah, at the rate its going Henry will be in college by the time you guys get your house." Emma laughed.

"We not intruding are we? Oh I told David that we shouldn't stay too long. The last thing I wanted to do was-"

"Whoa, whoa, relax. You're not really. I was just mocking David. And honestly this place is as much David and James as it is mine." Emma soothed. _A little more if I'm being honest, _she admitted quietly to herself.

"Well it does make me feel a bit better to remember that James has been crashing her longer than us." The brunette had a point, James had moved back into the old farm house quite some time ago now.

Before Emma could reply, her phone rang.

"Now I have service," she muttered to herself before answering. "Hello?"

"Emma, this is Doctor Whale. I'm calling about our new John Doe."

Emma had intended to go to the hospital alone, but seeing as Henry had latched himself to her legs and absolutely refused to be left behind, her plans had changed. That now left Emma sitting waiting in Dr. Whale's office reminding said boy several times not touch anything before giving up and pulling him onto her lap.

"Emma, thanks for coming in," Dr. Whale voice startled her more than she would care to admit. There was just something off about him that put her on edge. _And the old ghost stories about him resurrecting his dead dog from James probably aren't helping,_ she thought as she pulled Henry closer. "Hello young Henry," Dr. Whale said to the young boy.

"You said you wanted to talk about John Doe?" Emma prompted as Henry himself drew further back from the pale man sitting before her. _I'll have to keep James from saying anything to Henry or I'll never get him back here for his yearly check-up. _

"Yes, well seeing as we still don't have an ID on him, you're still his emergency contact. Now normally I would be informing any family members about his current condition, but right now we have to assume he doesn't have any." Dr. Whale began before being interrupted by a small voice.

"He hasn't got a family?" Henry asked looking up at his mom with large eyes. _Oh no, not that look._

"Not that we know of," Dr. Whale replied before Emma could stop him. "So I'm going to-"

"Then we can be his family!" Henry yelled, jumping in Emma's lap. "He can stay with us like the horses Momma brings home!"

"Henry, baby he's not a horse. And I need you to be quite for just a little bit so I can talk to Dr. Whale okay?" Truthfully Emma was a

bit mortified. Two seconds into the meeting and Henry already wanted to bring the man home. _Maybe it's Mary Margret and her happily ever after speeches that I need to keep Henry away from._

"As I was saying," Dr. Whale began again, with a side glance at the young boy in her lap who looked as if he was already planning out the stranger's room in her house. "I'm going to be keeping you up to date on any changes with John Doe."

"Any changes? Does that mean there hasn't been any change since last night? Is he still asleep?" A pit of worry was growing in her stomach.

"I'm afraid not, but he's had severe trauma. Aside from the crack in his skull, I also had to operate on his hand." Dr. Whale was now flipping through John Doe's chart, and pulled out an x-ray.

"Wait his hand? His hand was fine, the only blood I saw was on his head." She could remember every second of that ride to the hospital. She remembered how warm his blood felt as it seeped through the fabric of her jeans. She wondered how long she would remember that for. How long she would remember the feeling of dread, thinking that she might not make it in time. Even the thought now of how he could have slipped away while slung across her saddle made her sick.

"His left hand seemed to have be crushed upon impact. We've put it in a cast, but it was the lack of blood flow that caused the concern. His tissue went sometime without an oxygen. We were able to restore it, and the good news is that he should be able to regain nearly full use of it with some physical therapy." He delivered these line as if they were the weather. _You're not helping the rumors, buddy. _The thought almost made Emma laugh. Almost.

"So what now?" She asked.

"Can we see him?" Henry piped chimed in, unable to keep quite any longer.

"Of course." Dr. Whale stood abruptly, and turned to walk out of the room. "He's just down this way if you'll follow me."

Emma's head was spinning. Most people would take in a stray cat, or adopt a rescue dog. She had been known to take in a horse every now and then (despite what she told David about Misthaven not being a rescue). However, she had never seen a situation in which she would be taking on responsibility of a grown man. _Okay, get a grip you've always known that there's a fifty-fifty chance that you will be taking care of James for the rest of his life. _

Regardless, she was. At least until they found out who he was. So she walked with Henry behind Dr. Whale to John Doe's room. It wasn't a large room by any means, but it was private. It held only a single bed surrounded by machines. John Doe lay on said bed with all sorts of wires and tubes.

"He's got a trachea tube in right now to breathe for him, and we have him hooked up to an IV line with fluids. A nurse is coming in regularly to check on him, so if you're in here you might see one or myself." Dr. Whale didn't seem phased by how pale John Doe looked, or the large bandage now covering his forehead.

"Thank you Doctor." Emma said, hoping that this meeting was coming to a close so she could get herself and Henry away from this eerie man. _Come to think of it, I don't really want to leave John Doe with him either._

"Well, that's all I have for today. Just call if you need anything." With that, Dr. Whale walked quickly out of the room.

"Momma why's he sleeping?" Henry asked, pulling his hand from hers as he walked over to the bed before she could catch him.

"Honey be careful and don't touch!" Emma scolded while stopping Henry from grabbing John Doe's bandage hand. "He's hurt. His body needs sleep to get better."

"How'd he get hurt?" He was always so curious, never a dull moment with her sweet boy.

"I don't really know sweetie. He was in a bad car accident."

"And he's got no family? No momma?" His big sad brown eyes looked up at her with such heartbreak she could barely stand it. He couldn't bear to see someone in pain. He wanted the happily ever after Mary Margret had promised for everyone.

"I don't know sweetie. We won't know until he wakes up." Emma said gently, running her fingers through his hair.

"Then we have to wake him up!" Henry said excitedly. "After he wakes up we can find his family and he can live happy ever after!" Henry pulled her closer to the bed to get a better look at John Doe.

"It's not that simple baby, he's got to wake up on his own." She never wanted to break his little heart, but Emma couldn't let him run with false hope.

"Yeah it is! He's like the princess! He needs True Love's kiss to wake him up!" Henry always had loved his fairytales, she shouldn't have been surprised that a coma would remind him of a sleeping curse.

"Maybe." She said tiredly. "We can think about that tomorrow. We have to go see Uncle David and Uncle James right now okay?" It was still early in the day, but already Emma felt so exhausted. A long night, coupled with the very reason for it being in front of her with a worryingly pale complexion, was a little more than she wanted right now.

"Okay," Henry said. But he wouldn't leave before saying a proper good bye. At least that's what Emma had thought he was doing. In reality, Henry had something very important to say to Mr. John Doe:

"Don't worry, Momma and I will wake you up. Will find your true love."

3. Kiss Me

__**Kiss me like you wanna be loved**__**

>__**You wanna be loved**__**
>__**You wanna be loved**__**
>__**This feels like falling in love**__**

>__**Falling in love**__**
>__**We're falling in love.**__

__**-Ed Sheeran: Kiss Me**__

Emma had barely gotten Henry through the door of the police station before he was swooped out of her arms by James.

"Hey little man!" James laughed, tossing Henry in the air a couple feet before catching him again.

"One of these days I am gonna drop dead of a heart attack you know," Emma scolded, trying to resist the urge to pull her baby back into her arms.

"No mama, it's fun!" Henry laughed, clapping his hands for James to toss him again.

"Yeah, mama it's fun." James was smirking as David approached. He was followed by Graham, who seemed to be carrying a whole cabinet worth of files.

"What's he done now?" David asked, seeing the look on Emma's face.

"Oh the usual, throwing my child about like a football." Emma shook her head as James walked Henry over to his desk where he had hidden some toys from his last visit. "We just came by to ask about John Doe."

"No good news from the doctor I take it." Graham asked.

"Not unless you call still being asleep good news." Emma had yet to take her eyes off Henry, and before Graham could answer she overheard Henry's small voice telling James all about the Doctor's office.

"You went to see Dr. Whale, huh. Well did you hear-" James then dropped his voice lower and Emma knew she needed to act.

"David please God stop him. Dr. Whale is creepy enough as it is, I don't need any more trouble getting Henry to go see him than I already do."

"On it." David chuckled, rushing over to swoop Henry straight out of James arms. David then preceded to run straight out of the room with James running after him with a shout.

"Well now that that's settled, please tell me you have some good news." Emma turned to Graham then, with a hopeful expression.

"Well good news and bad." He replied with a sheepish smile. "Which one do you want first?"

Emma gave a dramatic sigh before her answer, "Just lay the bad news on me." They walked into Graham's office. It was the only office in

the station, as the entire force was made up of Graham as the sheriff, and James and David as his two deputies. Graham walked around to his chair, placing the large stack of files on his desk as he sat, gesturing for Emma to take the other seat.

"Well the bad news is that his entire car went up in flames, even the license plate was melted down."

"Which means you still have no idea who he is." _And I'm still his contact for the hospital. _The thought should have scared her, being responsible for this virtual stranger, but what actually frightened her was the fact that it didn't. It felt right.

"Unfortunately." He sighed.

"And the good news?"

"His car was expensive." Graham smiled.

"How is an expensive car going up in flames good news?" She asked, raising an eyebrow at the sheriff.

"Expensive cars belong to rich people, and rich people don't go missing without someone looking for them." He then pulled the file on the top of his stack toward him. Opening it, he handed it to Emma.

The file held a lot the Emma didn't understand, even after years of her brothers working in the field. "So you think someone will come to claim him?" The idea sat deep in her stomach, like a cold rock.

"Eventually, the car was unique. Special features you don't normally see- well from what the mechanic could make out after the fire was stopped." Graham told her, gesturing to parts of the file as he spoke.

"So the hope of finding this guys' family rests on Tillman's?" She had nothing against Michael, but since his ex-wife dropped his kids at his door and he gained full custody Emma couldn't help but notice that every repair seemed to take more than a little longer than it should.

"Storybrooke has had worse odd before and still found their mark." He shrugged.

"I guess so." Emma said. She turned her head to look out the window, hoping against hope that he didn't see her reaction to his words.

"Hey. I didn't- what I meant was â€"he paused, running one hand through his hair before continuing. "Are you going to be okay to do this? I can always have the hospital put someone else down as his emergency contact."

"I'm fine." Emma said quickly. "Just tell me what we do next."

"Really, Em. I know that road brings up a lot of-"

"I said I'm fine." She couldn't stop herself from snapping. _Just like he couldn't stop himself from asking. _She thought bitterly to herself. "What's next?"

"We get the report from Tillman. We put out an alert with the car and a description of him, and we check missing person reports. Hope something turns up." He replied after a moment, studying her carefully.

"And what do I need to do?" She asked tensely.

"There's nothing much you can do. Just the waiting game now." He said softly.

"Alright, I can do that from home. Call me if you find something." She stood quickly, leaving no room for debate as she left the office in search of her son and brothers.

It was only noon by the time Emma had dropped Henry off at day care with Aurora and returned to the ranch. It was yet another beautiful day, but she doubted that she would have any time for another trail ride. Not to mention the last one had pushed forward memories and thoughts she would rather forget. No, it was best to focus on work. Which is what she was doing now, as she led Marco's old gelding into his new pasture.

"I thought you weren't a rescue." Mary Margret's voice floated across the grass field as Emma walked back through the gate, and away from the gelding who was now happily grazing with the other older horse of Misthaven.

"I'm not." Emma knew this discussion was coming, but she had expected it to be David to bring it up.

"Really, because that's three more in the last month." Mary Margret laughed.

"And four rehomed in the last two. Anyways, who can say no to that face?" Emma smiled as she leaned against the fence, watching as an old mare meandered up to the fence in search of treats.

"Don't you mean 'how could you say no to Marco?'" Mary Margret teased. It was true, Emma never could say no to the kind old man. Not after he had adopted her childhood best friend when she was only eight.

"Fair point." She chuckled.

"How is August? I barely saw him when he brought Bug home last night." Mary Margret followed Emma to the barn.

"He's good," Emma began, placing her halter and lead on a hook to one of the stalls before heading to the tack room. "He's planning on staying in town a little longer this time." August had grown up in Storybrooke with Emma, but unlike her he had left the second his high school diploma had been placed in his hand. Since then he had become a world traveler. Not more than a couple days ever went by on his trips without Emma receiving a post card, letter, or skype call. Even from thousands of miles away he was still her best friend.

"That's wonderful!" Mary Margret exclaimed. "We all need to do something! Maybe have a nice dinner in the city." Emma could already see the party wheels turning in her head.

"Or a nice trail ride." Emma said with a smirk. It was something of a low blow, but she could resist seeing the look on her sister-in-law's face.

"Not funny." Mary Margret said glumly.

"Oh come on. You have to get back on a horse sometime."

It was common knowledge in Storybrooke that Mary Margret Blanchard and horses did not mix. She had grown up in a two bedroom apartment on Main Street living with only her father after her mothers had passed. It wasn't until her first date with David that she had ever even gotten close to a horse. The date had ended in disaster, with Mary Margret throwing her riding helmet at David's head "and catching him in the jaw in the process- and promising that she would never go out with him again.

"I think one near death experience is enough for a life time." Mary Margret replied, eyeing the horse in the stall closest to her with suspicion.

"You forget I was there. You in no way almost died, but you did almost take David's head off with that helmet." Emma pulled a beautiful dark roan out of the stall, causing Mary Margret to take several steps back as she hooked him up to the cross ties.

"I barely grazed him." Mary Margret retorted.

"He still has a scar." Emma laughed. "Either way, one mishap from David not tightening the girth and putting you on the wrong horse shouldn't stop you from riding forever." Emma couldn't imagine her life without horses. _At least not now_ It was best to stop that train of thought there.

"You might like hanging off the side of a horses who running at full pace, but I certainly don't." She had Emma there. Not many people in Storybrooke understood why she trained trick riding and liberty horses when she could be training cutting horses like David and James' mother Ruth had done.

"Speaking of which, I gotta get Rufio here out into the arena for some work." Emma said with a pat to the roan's neck. "His owner wants to follow the Rodeo circuit south this winter." Rufio's owner, Tina Bell, was a popular trick rider, but he didn't seem to respond to the girl's training methods quite like her other horses. When Tina heard about Misthaven from a friend she drove straight to Storybrooke and demanded that Emma help her train him.

"Alright, alright, I'll let you get to work. But talk to August, see what he wants to do." Mary Margret left Emma to saddle Rufio then.

"Okay boy, let's see why your owner thinks you're so lost in your training." Emma said softly to Rufio as she led him to the arena.

Emma was surprised at how much and little her life seemed to have changed since the crash. Her morning routine was thrown for. Normally she spent long mornings with Henry after feeding the horses and before dropping him off at day care. Now though, each morning was dedicated to visiting John Doe. After each visit her day seemed to pick up where it usually was though. Between her client horses and her house being full with her brothers Emma kept busy. Most nights in the last two weeks she had spent with August. He either came by for dinner with everyone or invited Emma and Henry over to dinner with his father. She loved to be able to talk to August in person again.

August didn't ask about John Doe or the accident the way everyone else seemed to. Mary Margret always asked with a tightly wound concern for the poor man lying in the hospital bed, and a well-meaning but felt condescending concern for Emma. David asked with a protective air, as if he wanted the answer only so he could protect her from it. James asked about him in the way he asked about everything, with a sense of humor. Emma couldn't help but hate answer Graham every morning. She couldn't explain why, but she felt almost guilty every time she had to tell the deputy that no, he wasn't awake yet and no, she could tell him where to find his family. August asked with understanding. He didn't ask to see if she was okay with all the memories that were being thrown her way. He didn't ask to see if she was handling everything. He asked, well he asked just to ask. Just to let her talk about this man lying in the hospital bed.

And Emma did want to talk about him. She wanted to talk about how Henry had started bringing fairy tales for her to read to him after talking to Dr. Whale. She wanted to talk about how Henry hugged him goodbye after every visit. She wanted to talk about his black leather jacket, which the blood had washed off nicely and was the only surviving article of his wardrobe after the crash. She wanted to talk about how despite the wash, sitting next to his jacket she could smell salt water and sunshine. She wanted to talk about the slowly fading tan line on his left ring finger. At least, what she could see of it in the cast. She wanted to talk about the scar on his cheek and wonder how he got it. Mostly though, she wanted to talk about how every time she walked Henry out the door, she wanted to turn back around and embrace him as Henry had. If only to give him some small comfort that he wasn't as alone as everyone in the town now thought.

She wanted to talk about all of this. Yet even with August, she didn't. She would tell him anything Dr. Whale had told her, any updates from the police station, and anything Henry had said. And as the best friend she knew him to be, he heard all the things she wanted to say, but left unsaid. She didn't know what she was going to do when he left today. She had told Henry that he wouldn't be going to day care today so that they could see him off after their daily visit to John Doe.

John Doe's room is where she now sat, reading Henry's story book to said man while Henry leaned against her leg.

"Momma?" Henry asked her suddenly.

"Yeah kid?" She asked, running her fingers through his hair.

"What if he hasn't met his princess yet?" He asked with wide eyes

looking up at her.

"What princess baby?" Emma asked, eyebrows pulling together in confusion.

"His princess, to wake him up from the curse! What if he hasn't seen her yet? Maybe she's here, maybe that's why the curse got 'em when he came here!" He bounced in the chair with each progressing thought.

"Henryâ€|" Emma didn't want to have to tell her son that this wasn't magic. That this wasn't an easy fix, a fairy tale world where only good things happened and princess and princes lived happily ever after. Emma had known that her whole life. She wanted to keep that pain from her son, but the last thing she wanted to do was give him false hope, only to yank the rug out from under him. "It's time to go." _A problem delayed is a problem denied._ She hoped at least.

"Already?" He pouted, sticking out his lower lip and giving her his best puppy dog eyes.

"Don't you want to spend one last day with Uncle August before he goes." She asked, knowing full well the answer.

"Yeah," he said with a dramatic sigh. "But I gotta say goodbye to Mr. Doe first." With that Henry was up and by John Doe's bed side, stepping on the chair to wrap his small arms around the unconscious man.

"Okay baby lets go." Emma said, holding out her hand for Henry to take.

A devious smile had crept upon Henry's face while she waited for him to take her hand.

Oh this is gonna be good. She thought to herself watching her boy.

"But Momma, you gotta say bye to Mr. Doe." Henry whined, still smiling like the cat that got the canary.

Emma eyed him before joining him at John Doe's bed side. She lightly squeezed the man's shoulder before muttering a quite good bye. "Alrighty Henry, we gotta move." She started to walk away before a small hand wrapped around her's holding her in place.

"Momma! Henry complained. "He needs a real bye, like the bye's Uncle August get!"

Uncle August â€" oh. Oh I see. Emma thought to herself. Emma never let August leave without a kiss to his cheek for good luck on his travels, a tradition they had started long ago. _Henry thinks John Doe needs True Love's kiss, and that his True Love is in Storybrooke_. What better way to find it then to have random people start kissing this poor comatose man. A thought occurred to Emma then. She may not have to tell Henry that all these fantasies were just that, a fantasy. She could show him, little by little, what the real world was without crushing him. John Doe would wake up eventually, and when he did Henry would see it as it was; a medical

condition, not a sleeping curse.

"Oh how silly of me," Emma said playing along.

With a silent apology to her "no not her" John Doe, Emma leaned down slowly and placed her lips softly to John Doe's cheek.

4. Wake Me Up

So wake me up when it's all over,

When I'm wiser and I'm older,

All this time I was finding myself,

And I didn't know I was lost.

-Avicci: Wake Me Up

If there was one thing that could be said about Emma, it was that she was a sensible woman. Years of working with horses had taught her to believe what she could see, what she could feel. She knew when a horse was scared by watching his nostrils flair or by feeling him tense underneath the saddle. She knew when a rescued who had come to her had been abused by the way he flinched at the slightest move. She could feel love when Bug pushed her muzzle gently into her chest. She could see when a horse was frustrated, lazy, or content. She could see things in their expression that others could. She knew things from looking at them, even when Mary Margret called her crazy or told her they were "just a horse". She knew all these things because she had learned them over the years. She had learned them through physical proof. Years of sweat, blood, and tears.

If there's one thing that couldn't be said about Emma, it was that she believed in the fantastical. To her, magic existed in watching Henry with his pony learning to ride. It was in playing cards on Friday night with James, or helping David and Mary Margret with their new house. It was the small moments in her life that she knew others would take for granted. It was not in fairy tales. It wasn't spells or dragons. It was a wand or glass slipper. And it most certainly was in True Love's kiss or sleeping curses.

Emma knew all of this. That, however, didn't stop her mind from wandering. It also didn't stop her from screaming out in fright as John Doe took a gasping breath in and reached his hands up the second her lips touched his cheek.

"Oh God!" Emma cried leaping backwards, taking Henry with her on the way.

John Doe was now awake. Awake and currently trying to pull all his tubes and wires off.

"Momma you did it!" Henry cheered, clapping his hands from where he dangled in her arms.

"I- " Emma began before the noises started. All the machines surrounding John Doe were protesting the sudden changes. Everything was beeping. The lines on his heart monitor were jumping, and his IV

stand was shrieking. Fortunately, Emma and Henry were the only one to notice.

Several nurses were now running into the room, trying to restrain John Doe. Dr. Whale " _did that man ever go home? _" was hot on their heels.

"Is he okay?" Henry asked with a clearer head than Emma.

Dr. Whale seemed to notice them for the first time since entering the room. "Ms. Swan, if I could ask you to step out." He dismissed her before injecting something into John Doe's arm.

She did not need to be told twice. She grabbed her bag and drug Henry out of the room faster than she would have thought possible. Her mind was spinning.

He's awake. You kissed him. And he's awake. The thoughts were running in a loop now. _That's ridiculous. He did not wake up because you kissed him._

"Momma you kissed him and he woke up!" Henry said excitedly, jumping up and down in front of her. _Well fuck a duck, _she thought, looking down at him and remembering that she wasn't alone. And that she wasn't the only one to witness the fact that a man mysteriously woke from a coma after a kiss from her. "That means you're his True Love!" He was clapping again. She really couldn't catch a break.

"Henry, I- he didn't " ugh. There's a lot of reasons that he could have woken up." Emma looked sadly down at her son. This plan had not worked out as she thought. _Sure, just show him that magic's not real. Don't worry the universe won't just majorly screw you over just for the fucking fun of it like it always does._

"Yeah, like cuz you're his True Love." He was giggling now. _Little bastard. Just like his Uncle James._

"No, Henry. I'm not his True Love." She tried to say it as gently as possible as she bent down to his level. "But now that he's waking up, we can find his family. We can ask him." She tried to put a smile on her face, despite the sinking feeling that her heart held once the words tumbled from her lips.

"But-" Henry began, his lower lips slowly sliding out further and further. _Oh no, _she thought, _he's pulling out the pout._ His pout almost never failed to get him his way. But there was no way he could get what he wanted this time. Neither of them could.

Luckily, she was saved by the bell, as Dr. Whale came out of the room. "Ah, Ms. Swan."

"Doctor," she responded, waiting. What she was waiting for she couldn't really tell. Was it for his name? The marching order to go to the sheriff's station and find his family? Was it to tell her that a sleeping curse had just broke? That she was on a reality game show or just been punked?

"So it looks like today's the day." He began with a smile. "Looks like our John Doe is going to be fine after all."

"He's awake? Just like that?" She could see he was awake, but unlike the horses she knew so well, she didn't have years of experience with this. To believe in something like this, she would need a bit more. _I guess I'll have to figure out what it is I need a bit more of._

"Seems so, as of right now we really have no idea what caused him to wake up." He almost seemed as confused as her, but not nearly as concerned.

"I do! I do! I do!" Henry interrupted, waving his hand in the air while jumping up and down.

"Oh really?" Dr. Whale asked amused.

"Yeah it was-" Henry didn't get to finish that sentence before Emma slapped a hand over his mouth with a hurried "don't bother the doctor".

"So what now, do we call his family or the sheriff's station first?" Emma asked, feeling as if she was standing on the edge of a large abyss.

"Well that's kind of the thing," he seemed almost sheepish now, facing Henry and Emma. As if he had left something very important at home and just now realized he needed it. "We still don't really have any family to call. He doesn't seem to remember who he is."

Way to bury the lead on that one.

"He has amnesia?" Emma asked, clearly her life was becoming a telenovela.

"It's not actually surprising, he cracked his head on his door large hard enough to fracture his skull." He shrugged at this. Apparently when someone you're suddenly responsible for hits his head hard enough to forget who he is it's not a big deal. She would have to remember to turn that into a bumper sticker.

"He's been cursed again!" Henry said, after finally wiggling his head free of his mother's hold.

"What?" Dr. Whale didn't look as amused as he had before.

"Nothing." Emma said quickly, grabbing Henry again. "So what do we do now?"

"Now we monitor him. See if his memory starts coming back. You can go in and meet him if you like."

"Okay!" Henry yelled before taking off to John Doe's room.

"Henry!" Emma ran after him, tossing Dr. Whale an apologetic look as she did. _No reason to piss off Dr. Frankenstein._

Henry made it into the room before she could catch him, vaulting straight onto John Doe's bed and landing almost in his lap.

"You're finally awake!" Henry cheered once again.

Emma cringed watching John Doe, the man was clearly confused. His brow furrowed at Henry before turning his gaze to her.

Emma gasped. In all the confusion and panic she had yet to notice the eyes of the man she had been watching over. Now though, the most beautiful shade of deep blue was staring at her, leaving her breathless and paralyzed.

Emma believed what she saw, but though she could see the floor beneath her feet, she felt nothing but his eyes looking deep into hers and couldn't have told a soul what the truth of anything was in that moment.

He broke eye contact first, looking back to Henry, who was now bouncing up in down in front of John Doe talked excitedly about curses. Henry had climbed further into the man's lap, and was now one bounce away from tossing himself clean off the bed.

What happened next made Emma's knees weak. Sensing Henry's impending fall, the man reached up both hands and placed them on the small boy's waist to keep him steady. He winced at a particularly rapid bounce from Henry, and Emma realized that it probably hurt like hell to be holding Henry steady with his hand in a cast. The thought finally broke Emma from her trance.

"I'm so sorry." She said rushing forward quickly, to pull Henry off of the poor man.

Twenty seconds in as his guardian and already I've left a four year old attack him.

"Henry baby, you can't jump on him like that." Emma admonished, mostly for something to do rather than be pulled back into the questioning stare of her John Doe.

"It's quite alright." In that moment Emma thought she would remember those words for the rest of her life. The first words ever spoken between her and a man that had already been through so much together. And all of it without a single bit of his knowledge. It was the accent that pulled her eyes back to his, she had not been expecting an British accent from the leather jacket and biker boots.

As it turns out, looking back at him had been a mistake. Once again, Emma found herself locked in his gaze, and it seemed neither of them were inclined to break it. In other circumstances she might have been thinking about the blueness of his eyes, as if she was looking into an ocean or something like that, but now, as his gaze searched hers, she felt only as if she was looking into the eyes of an old and trusted friend. Someone she had known for a very long time, and someone who knew her better than herself. Cold licks of fear ran down her spine.

Henry was not as amused by this charade as he seemed to be everything else.

"Momma we woke him up." Henry reminded her, pulling on her hand with his. "We gotta break his new curse."

"My what?" John Doe asked just as Emma started to quite Henry again.

"You're curse! You were sleeping like the princess and now you can't remember so we gotta get your memories back so you can live happy ever after!" Henry gave John Doe a tooth grin, and Emma worried that he might make a jump for his bed again.

"Did you just call me a princess?" John Doe asked with an amused smirk. _That's what he focused on? _Emma could help but chuckle to herself, and pray that he didn't toss that smirk her way. _Lord knows it could be trouble._

"Henry, why don't you go and wait with Dr. Whale while we talk okay?" Emma really didn't want Henry to slip and say more about sleeping curses or how he thinks she broke it. _Yeah so you were in a coma and I kind of kissed you. No big deal, really!_

"Okay Momma, you can _talk_." _Did he just put air quotes around that? _She couldn't believe Henry. Her son the wingman trying to set her up with the coma man. _Well kissing the guy probably didn't help to discourage him._

"Go." She said sternly, pushing his small shoulders to the door. She waited until the door swung shut to turn back to John Doe. When she did, she found him to be wearing a pained expression.

"Are you alright? Did he hurt you when he jumped on you?" Emma stepped closer to his bed, hands waving in the air around him looking for something to do to ease his pain.

"I'm sorry," He said, looking at her again with pain.

"For what?" What could this man possibly be apologizing to her for?

"I don't remember you. Either of you, and I'm sorry. I'm sorry if that's going to hurt him, or you." He looked at her then with something, something she hadn't seen anyone look at her with in a long time. It made her want to run. It made her want to stay.

"Oh, no, you don't- I mean we don't- We've never met." She said quickly, the air around them becoming thick and awkward.

"What?" He asked, the pain had left his face to be replaced by confusion once again.

"We don't know each other. Well, I know you I guess. I mean, not really. I'm not making any sense am I?" She asked, only if to stop her rambling. She didn't quite understand what was happening. She was never one to get flustered easy. Something about this man just seemed to bring it out of her.

"I'm afraid not lass." The confusion was still there, but a new kind of pain seemed to be etching its way across his face. "Why don't you start at the beginning?"

Well that works. Emma thought.

End
file.